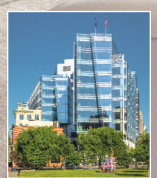
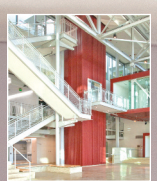
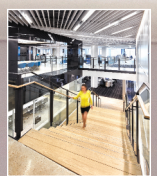
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Main staircase of the Toyota Government Affairs office, by Gensler.

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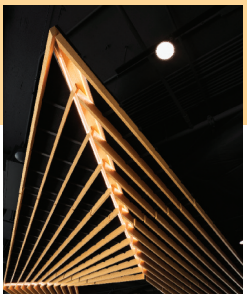
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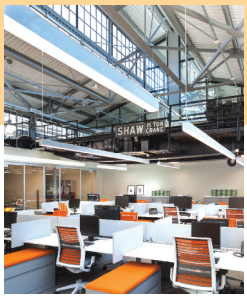
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ON THE COVER: The new offices of ***The Washington Post***, by Gensler. Photo © Garrett Rowland









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FROM THERE TO HERE



Bradley W. Johnson

This past July 4th, I was in Antwerp, Belgium, where I visited the Red Star Line Museum. The museum, which opened in 2013, uses three historic port buildings to tell the story of two million people who fled persecution and poor economic prospects to board Red Star Line passenger ships in Antwerp in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in search of a better life in the United States and Canada. We all know the story of European immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, but the Red Star Line buildings in Antwerp are where many of their voyages began.

As I walked through the museum—a beautiful facility designed by Beyer Blinder Belle, which has an office here in Washington—I was moved by how much courage it must have taken for these people (no matter what conditions they faced in their home countries) to leave behind all that they knew and travel with few possessions to a distant and only vaguely understood new land. Many of them, the museum makes clear, undertook arduous journeys just to reach Antwerp from Russia and other parts of Europe.

Beyer Blinder Belle's design for the museum includes a new observation tower, shaped somewhat like a ship's bow, which overlooks Antwerp's now-sprawling modern port facility on the Scheldt River. Embedded in the floor of the overlook platform are seven small metal arrowheads, each indicating a European point of origin for the emigrants. They all point to a metal star symbolizing Antwerp and the Red Star Line. And then pointing away from the star, in the direction of the Scheldt and the Atlantic beyond, are seven more metal arrowheads indicating the US and Canadian destinations of Red Star Line ships. It is a quietly beautiful design detail.

Welcome!

Standing at the overlook and gazing out toward the sea, I wondered what those emigrants must have felt as they boarded ships for a long journey to an uncertain future. I felt great respect for the people who took that gamble, and wondered if I would have been able to do the same.

(continued on next page)



Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp, Belgium. The renovation and addition to the historic buildings were designed by Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners LLP.

Photo courtesy Red Star Line Museum, Filip Dujardin



De Rotterdam building (at right), Rotterdam, The Netherlands, by OMA.

One of those Red Star Line emigrants was a five-year-old named Israel Isidore Baline. He later changed his name to Irving Berlin and became one of America's greatest songwriters, penning "God Bless America," among other famous tunes. One of his pianos is on display at the museum.

Reading Berlin's story and others at the museum was a deeply meaningful way to celebrate the Fourth. I was in Belgium, but for me and my husband (whose family on his mother's side emigrated from Eastern Europe in the early 20th century), it was a very American moment.

We were in Antwerp that day as a side trip from Rotterdam, The Netherlands, and as it turns out, our hotel in Rotterdam was built on the site of a similar point of departure, this time for the Holland America line. The hotel takes up part of a large mixed-use building, called De Rotterdam, which was designed by Rem Koolhaas and also completed in 2013. Intended as a vertical neighborhood of 5,000 people, the complex also includes apartments, offices, and restaurants. It has become Rotterdam's most iconic structure, even more than the nearby Erasmusbrug, the modern cable-stayed bridge over Rotterdam's Nieuwe Maas River. The views from our hotel room toward the bridge, the river, and the city beyond were breathtaking.

With more than 1.7 million square feet of space, De Rotterdam is the largest building in the Netherlands. And at 44 floors, it is much taller than anything in Washington. Even so, our infamous J. Edgar Hoover FBI headquarters building, with only one-quarter as many floors, is even larger, with 2.8 million square feet of floor space. At this writing, with the project to move the FBI headquarters to a new site having been cancelled, it now looks like we will have live with what our editor has called "the swaggering bully of the neighborhood" for some time to come.

Elsewhere in the city, however, new office buildings are being built, and this issue of *ARCHITECTUREDC* focuses on showing you several recent examples. We hope you enjoy reading about them. Thanks for all your kind comments on the last issue, and we look forward to hearing from you.

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DetailsDC

This Side of the Tracks

by G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA

Project: MOI,
Washington, DC

Architects: **Gensler**
Mechanical Engineers: **Greenman-Pedersen, Inc.**
Lighting Consultants: **Lighting Workshop**
Acoustical Consultants: **Cerami & Associates, Inc.**
Contractor: **HITT Contracting, Inc.**

MOI, a commercial furniture dealer originally known as Maryland Office Interiors, recently moved its DC office to a new building in the NoMa neighborhood near Union Station. Because the long side of the triangular building overlooks a broad expanse of railroad tracks, much of the office space enjoys open views across the city. Those views gave rise to a theme for the interior design—"New Horizon"—which also served as a metaphor for MOI's efforts to broaden its image and range of services.

The building's triangular plan posed challenges for the office layout. The project team from **Gensler**, led by design director and senior associate **Hansoo Kim, IIDA**, felt that a dynamic but well-defined circulation system was the key to organizing the space. To achieve this, Gensler devised a custom-made network of oak slats suspended from the ceiling along circulation routes. This linear array—suggestive of the railroad tracks visible just outside the office windows—zigs and zags through the space, providing navigational clues to visitors while also emphasizing perspectives that reinforce the New Horizon theme. When two paths meet at an acute angle, the wooden fins collide dramatically to form virtual arrows pointing into the distance.

Lighting is integrated into the wooden slat system, though not in the way one might expect. Instead of specifying linear fixtures in between and parallel to the slats, Gensler opted for perpendicular fixtures. Lights were placed with an eye toward softly highlighting the junctures where fins of different angles come together.



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Views of the ceiling treatment in circulation spaces of MOI.

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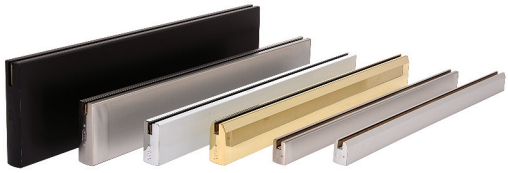


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The new building at 600 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, as seen from the small park across 6th Street.

Every Story Has Two Sides

CORE's New Office Building Addresses a Complex Downtown Site

by Ronald O'Rourke

All photos © Maxwell MacKenzie



The shallow pool running along the base of the Massachusetts Avenue façade.

Project: 600 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC

Architects: **CORE**
Landscape Architects: **GGN**
Lighting Designers: **George Sexton Associates**
Structural Engineers: **SK&A Structural Engineers**
MEP Engineers: **Girard Engineering**
Civil Engineers: **Wiles Mensch Corporation**
LEED Consultants: **Sustainable Design Consulting**
Acoustics Consultants: **Polysonics**
Elevator Consultants: **VDA**
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Being called two-faced is usually an insult, but for the new office building at 600 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, it's a point of pride.

The 11-story, 400,000-square-foot structure, designed by **CORE architecture + design**, occupies a parcel near Mount Vernon Square that was assembled over time by the project's developer, Kingdon Gould III. The site is irregularly shaped and faces distinct architectural contexts on its opposing Massachusetts Avenue and I Street sides, creating a complex architectural challenge. CORE responded with a design whose two principal facades, like non-identical siblings, present different but related faces to the public.

"With the vastly different building requirements that govern the Massachusetts Avenue and historic I Street sides of this building, we purposefully developed a design that has a Janus-like quality to it," said **Guy Martin, AIA**, a principal at CORE.

On the building's north side, where it forms part of a fairly monumental stretch of Massachusetts Avenue, the structure is tall, glassy, and somewhat monolithic, like the new office building across the street at 601 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, and the next building beyond that, at 655 K Street, NW. Together, the three buildings form a sequence that seemingly takes its cue from the glass-clad front of the Washington Convention Center, expressing a modernist style along the east side of the square that plays off the classical style of the Carnegie Library building at the square's center and the area's sinuously-curved brick-clad residential buildings designed by Phil Esocoff, FAIA, that have been noted in previous issues of this magazine (see the Spring 2012 issue of *ARCHITECTUREDC*).

On its south side, in contrast, 600 Massachusetts responds to a block of I Street characterized by smaller masonry-clad structures, including the Sixth & I Historic Synagogue. Here, the building's design shifts to a terraced assemblage of brick- and glass-clad volumes that frames a group of preserved historic brick structures, including two that were moved to that location in part to give the group more of a critical mass. "The goal was to match the brick masonry material of the older buildings on I Street, while differentiating the new building," Martin said.

In addition to mediating between the low height of the older existing structures and the new building's own higher floors, the cascading terraces create extensive landscaped outdoor space for tenants. "There are no other office buildings in Washington with the amount and quality of green space that 600 Mass has," said **Ron Ngiam, AIA**, a senior designer at CORE. "When spring growth begins, the outdoor areas, especially the rooftop terrace, will be spectacular." The terrace on the 10th floor includes a bocce ball court.

The building tapers on its east end to present a narrow third façade on 6th Street, NW. If the two principal façades are the building's well-mannered siblings, this third façade, with a pair of angle-edged glass surfaces suggesting a rocky cliff or an iceberg, might be considered the wild child. The glass edges extend slightly beyond the enclosed part of the building, into the open air, allowing those window

walls to be read as planes that are slipping past the building. It's a feature that can be found on a few other recent downtown office buildings, notably 1999 K Street, NW, which also employs an angled edge.

Washington's diagonal streets frequently pose a challenge for architects deciding how to treat the narrow end of a building. A common response has been to round it off—a strategy that is done well on some buildings, but less so on others, sometimes becoming a lazy, throwaway architectural gesture. CORE's squared-off and angle-edged design represents a departure from this approach.

"It doesn't default to a tower form, but instead uses the complex geometry of the site to create a dynamic corner form," Martin said. "The different angles of glass wall vary slightly in color throughout the day, reinforcing the inherent complex angles of the two streets and the remaining alley." Martin noted that the way the building handles the corner at 6th Street and Massachusetts Avenue is probably his favorite thing about the building's design.

Although they have differing personalities, the three facades of 600 Massachusetts are tied together by a continuity of materials to create an integrated design for the building. Common elements across the facades include window frame materials and configurations, and textured light-gray granite panels.

Visitors entering the building on its north side cross over a shallow pool that forms part of a water feature running along that side of the building. The feature serves as the spine of a small urban park that acts as both an oasis and a buffer between the building and the busy street, putting 600 Massachusetts into a small club of downtown office buildings with publicly accessible water elements that are something more than simple fountains. Other members of this club include the Universal North office building at 1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, which tucks a gentle waterfall into its sloping T Street side facing the Washington Hilton Hotel; the National Geographic complex on M Street, NW, between 16th and 17th streets, with its Zen-like rock-sculpture pool; and the CityCenterDC mixed-use complex (see the Fall 2013 issue of *ARCHITECTURE**DC***), which has a water scrim running through its central courtyard.

The water element at 600 Massachusetts "began as a sunken court with a bridge leading to the main entrance," Martin said. "It was derived from the Chinese tradition of bridge-gates to important places. In the course of the many approval steps, the design became a glass bridge over a pool of water. The landscape designers, Guthrie Gustafson Nichol, took that idea and extended it into the long rill [i.e., small stream] that runs the length of the Massachusetts Avenue façade, separating a semi-private zone next to the building from the public zone along the avenue."

The building includes a second entrance on its I Street side. Upon entering the building, visitors encounter a four-story enclosed atrium. The building offers its tenants a number of amenities in addition to the terraces, including a fitness center, a bicycle locker room, and a 300-car underground garage.



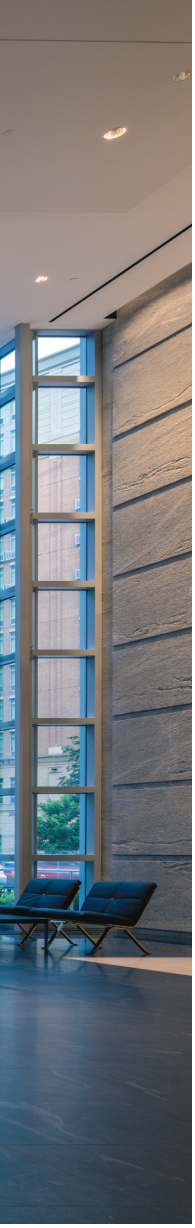
The glassy Massachusetts Avenue façade, which is broken up by a series of projecting bays.

View of the building from the southeast, showing solar shading devices on the south-facing glass façades and new, brick-clad wings (at left) adjacent to historic buildings (foreground).


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The spacious lobby of 600 Massachusetts Avenue, NW.

A roof terrace at 600 Massachusetts Avenue, NW.



With its extensive use of glass, one might think the building is an energy hog, but that's not the case. "Several strategies allowed the use of the glass," Martin said. "The orientation of the Massachusetts Avenue side is just east of north, so it has very little solar gain. On the south side, the glass wall has a system of sunshades, using fritted glass to cut down on solar gain. The glass itself [from Viracon] is a high-performance insulated glass unit and the curtain wall structure has an integral thermal break." The glass on the south side has a special coating and a slightly grey tint to reduce solar gain, while the glass on the north side has a slightly different coating and a clearer tint. The building's numerous sustainable design features earned it a LEED Platinum certification—the highest possible LEED certification.

Although it is a new building, 600 Massachusetts has a long history—Martin drew the first sketches for the project for developer Gould in 1981. "I first sketched an office building fronting on Massachusetts Avenue," Martin said. "As the developer acquired lots facing I Street, we explored a two-building solution. Some elements of the current design began to appear in the early schemes—the height on Massachusetts Avenue, and how a new office building would meet the historic I Street."

The new building at 600 Massachusetts "is one of the most challenging projects that I have worked on," Martin said. "The site was in two different zoning districts. We had to get approval from the Office of Planning, the Historic Preservation Review Board (because the south half was in the downtown historic district), the Chinatown Steering Committee (because the entire site was within the boundaries of the Chinatown District), and the City Council, which had to rule on an alley closing. We also went before the Mayor's Agent [for historic preservation] to get permission to remove a much-modified townhouse [at 627 I Street], and to move two other row houses [at 621 and 623 I Street] to the east end of the block, where they could reinforce the existing row houses there."

Even more challenging, he added, "was to create, out of all these regulatory restraints, a cohesive piece of architecture." To accomplish that, "we worked the design out in massing models first, taking advantage of one unique aspect of the site: the amount of space allowed under the zoning was considerably less than what could have been built within the height limits, so we didn't have to create a box." The site's complex shape "worked to create floors with lots of window wall. Despite all of the complexities and hurdles we faced working on this site, I feel that we did create a cohesive architectural design that has both its own integrity and reinforces the surrounding context."

Working on this site, Martin said, "reinforced my view that the DC zoning code normally has an almost one-to-one correlation between the envelope allowed and the number of square feet allowed. The result is basically a series of boxes. I support the height limit in general, but I would suggest increasing the allowable height by one floor—but *not* increasing the FAR [floor area ratio—the ratio of a building's total floor area to the size of the site upon which it is built]. This will give designers greater flexibility to shape the buildings and possibly create public space on site."

In Washington, he added, "with the increasing layers of civic and governmental review, architects must fight for excellence and avoid the easy compromise in the design of buildings. I do feel that design can have complexity with integrity. All of that said, the quality of design in Washington office buildings has definitely improved over the years. There is much more awareness of amenities and light."





Main entrance off Massachusetts Avenue.



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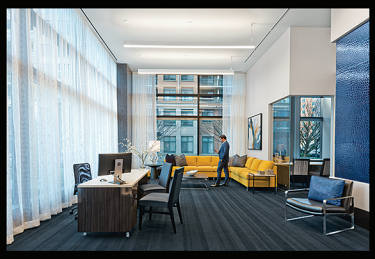
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View of 1000 F Street, NW, with renovated historic structure at the corner and new building wrapping around it.

All photos © Mary Parker Architectural Photography

Slipped Right In

Shalom Baranes Inserts a New Building into a Narrow F Street Site

by Ronald O'Rourke

Designing a new office building for Washington's established downtown area can sometimes require slipping a new structure into a tight spot between existing older buildings. That was especially the case for 1000 F Street, a new office tower designed by **Shalom Baranes Associates** (SBA) that is carefully fitted into a narrow, L-shaped plot surrounding a two-story historic commercial structure at the corner of 10th and F streets, NW. SBA's design for the new building pays close attention to its surrounding architectural context while making efficient use of its limited footprint.

The 11-story building, with about 7,000 square feet of retail space and 85,000 square feet of office space, employs massing that mediates the differing heights of adjoining buildings, as well as external materials—particularly terracotta panels—that complement the new building's masonry-clad neighbors. The existing commercial structure at the corner was renovated on the inside and integrated into the project.

Project: 1000 F Street, NW,
Washington, DC

Architects: **Shalom Baranes Associates**
Landscape Architects/Civil Engineers: **Dewberry**
Structural Engineers: **Tadjer-Cohen-Edelson Associates**
MEP Engineers: **Girard Engineering**
Geotechnical Engineers: **ECS**
Fire Protection Engineers: **JENSEN HUGHES**
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Historic Materials Consultants: **Aeon Preservation Services**
Architectural Historians: **EHT Traceries**
Contractor: **DAVIS Construction**

"A higher and [a] lower volume frame the historic building, with extensive outdoor terrace spaces at roof levels and setbacks," SBA said. "The massing scheme uses the compact vertical site as an asset. The upper volume anchors the corner, pinwheeling down in height to scale with the surrounding variety."





The F Street façade of the new building.

The office building's new masonry block, the firm said, "is wrapped with a metal-and-glass curtainwall, stepping down to the six-story projecting pavilion facing 10th Street, then elegantly dips down to meet the two-story historic building." The external materials "relate to the historic material context, which is primarily brick and stone masonry, with ornamental metals such as copper and bronze. The design uses terracotta on principal façades, with stainless steel and aluminum accents as a modern interpretation of these influences."

The project at 1000 F Street is one of several buildings designed by SBA in recent years that makes extensive use of terracotta panels. "Terracotta is a wonderful, versatile material which has a history about as long as human civilization," said **Patrick Burkhart, AIA**, a principal at SBA. "Its resurgence in this country is a postscript to its use in Europe, where it has never really fallen out of favor. Today, it remains a malleable material with a wide variety of finishes that work well with modern rain-screen building envelopes. It also has a varying level of art and craft in its production that gives it something of a human imprint."



Close-up of the renovated commercial building with the new structure behind it.





The lobby of 1000 F Street, NW.

The intersection of 10th and F streets includes two other buildings with SBA-designed additions: the Atlantic building at 930 F Street, NW, and the Woodward & Lothrop building at 1025 F Street, NW. "Having had the opportunity to design major new additions to the historic buildings at the southeast and northwest corner sites at the intersection of 10th and F streets, this project provided a unique moment to weave old with new," Burkhart said. "So, a lot of thought preceded the design process for this, the third corner site."

The biggest challenge, he said, "was developing a massing and skin approach that struck a balance between the potential height of the new construction and the modest scale of historic structures within and beyond the site. Through a combination of hand sketches, clay models, and computer-generated 3D images, we began to shape the new construction as a series of interlocking rectilinear volumes that cascaded downward in essentially three steps, from a maximum height of 120 feet to the two-story historic corner building." The process was "a spiral approach moving from the elemental massing to the articulated facades in a collaborative design team effort."

Integrating the historic building into the fabric of new construction, Burkhart said, led to another challenge "as we discovered major structural deficiencies with the commercial building in the construction phase. That, however, gave us an opportunity to open up the second floor [of the commercial building] and create a new floor plate that provides a really unique office loft space."

The site's tight dimensions drove a careful use of available interior space in the new building. Loading, service, and office tower core elements were placed in the tower's darker southwest side, enabling open office floor plans with windows on virtually all four sides above the historic commercial building. "Another challenge was accommodating below-grade vehicular parking on a very small rectangular lot that was further restricted by the historic building," Burkhart said. "A deep garage was cost-prohibitive. So, we implemented a vehicular elevator to eliminate a ramp and incorporated two-tier vehicular lifts which stacked one car above another." Attendants at the 45-car facility navigate vehicles to the vertically stacked spaces.

Burkhart particularly likes "the sense of verticality the project delivers while still being respectful of the pedestrian-level scale that the historic building provides. For many architects practicing in the District, the 1910 Height Act really challenges one's sense of proportion, and this is one moment where the small footprint of the site and the allowable height and density led us to embrace the sense of height and juxtaposition of scales."

Reflecting on Washington office building design in general, Burkhart added that "the penchant for all-glass facades needs to be tempered with a sensitivity to place. By that, I mean not only an aesthetic appropriateness to a particular site and context, but perhaps more importantly, a rational approach to energy conservation accounting for local climate and solar orientation. With 1000 F Street, we did incorporate large areas of glazing along with terracotta and brick masonry, but oriented the large glazed areas to the east and incorporated horizontal sun shades." The building has been pre-certified at the LEED Gold level for its sustainable design features.

"Office building design," Burkhart said, "is a never-ending evolution, as the nature of how we work and why we work is ever-changing. Here in Washington, we have a special opportunity to really integrate live/work pursuits due to the texture of varied yet concentrated land uses. We also have the challenge of balancing the tendency towards horizontal dispersion with the desire to go vertically. Adding a few more feet to the height limits in certain areas may be beneficial."

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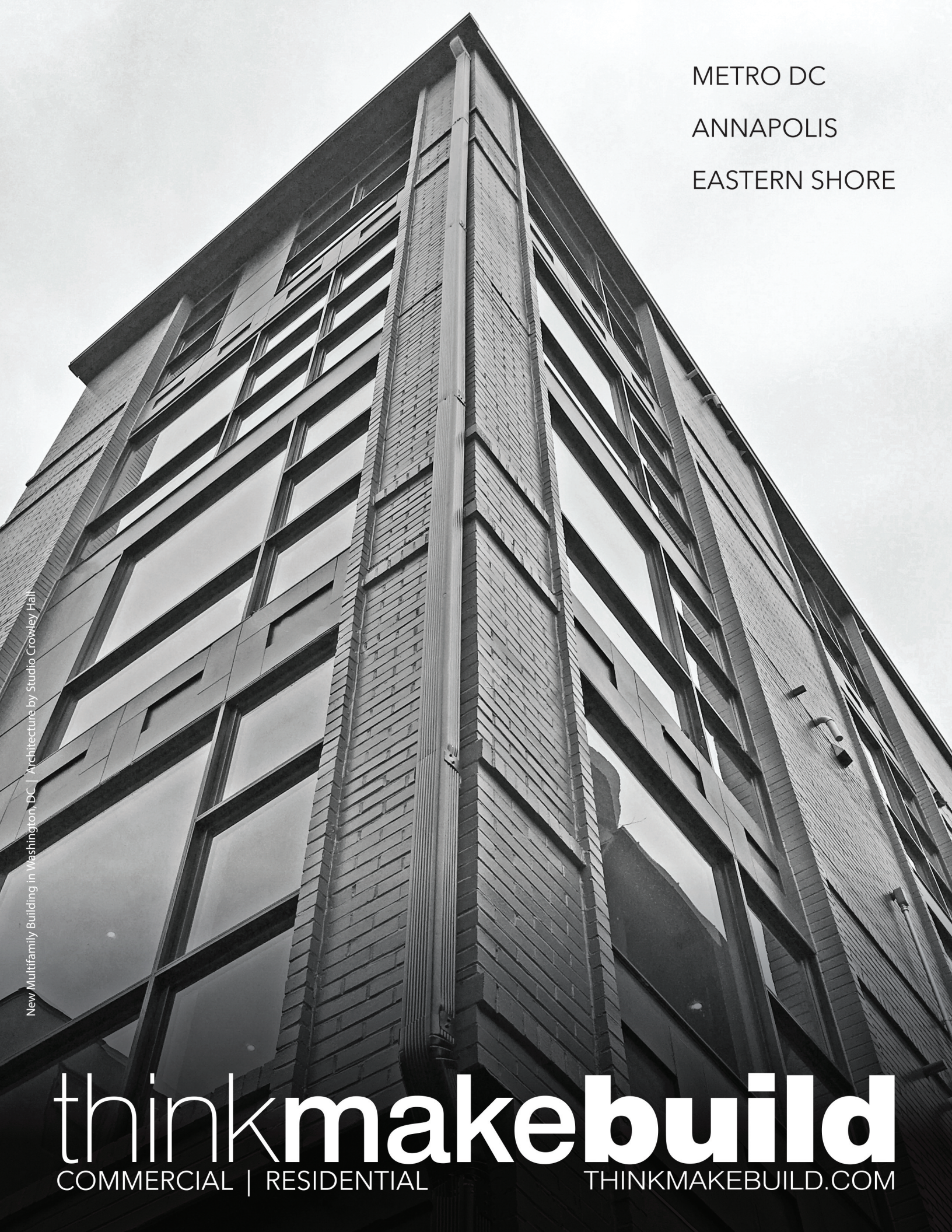
1000 F Street, NW by Shalom Baranes Associates

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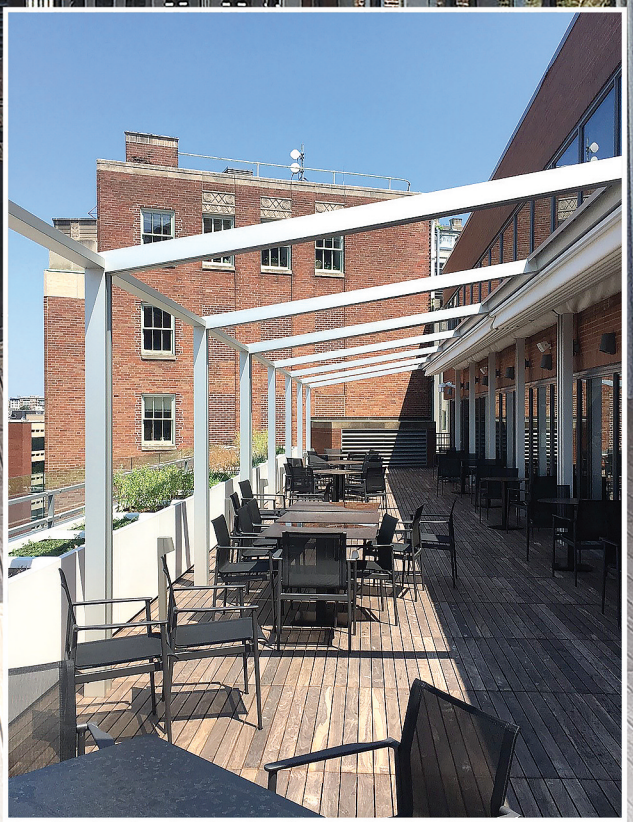
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Renovated exterior of 2316 Rhode Island Avenue, NE, now the 5 Points Small Business Resource Center.

The building before renovation.
Courtesy of HGA Architects and Engineers

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Starting Up in Woodridge

Abandoned Storefront Transformed into Coworking and Community Space

by Peter James, AIA, LEED AP BD+C

In the 21st-century economy, the archetypal digital nomad—armed only with a laptop and a cell phone—has the freedom to work anywhere with a wi-fi connection: home, a coffee shop, even poolside. However, this liberation from the confines of the traditional office can be socially isolating, and limits the free exchange of ideas that happens naturally in a shared workplace. To counter this isolation, coworking environments offer freelancers and entrepreneurs the shared resources of a traditional office: cubicles and private offices, conference rooms, robust IT and A/V infrastructure, and shared social spaces.

In contrast with most coworking facilities, which operate under national brands and market to a wide spectrum of users, the 5 Points Business Center in Northeast DC's residential Woodridge neighborhood has a narrow focus—to support small businesses in the emerging Rhode Island Avenue, NE, commercial corridor and Ward 5.

Project: 5 Points Small Business Resource Center,
2316 Rhode Island Avenue, NE, Washington, DC

Architects: **HGA Architects and Engineers**
Contractor: **Lofft Construction**

The non-profit SB Works, which developed and runs the center, envisioned 5 Points as a "local, home-grown neighborhood incubator," says John Mains, executive director. "We didn't want to be perceived as gentrifiers in the neighborhood."



Ground floor work and meeting space.

In addition to typical office amenities—desks, offices, conference rooms, shared printers and videoconferencing technology—educational seminars and subsidized consulting are offered on topics including accounting, marketing, and legal issues. Evenings and weekends, the center is available to community groups for meetings.

In keeping with the home-grown theme, the project designer for the renovation of this small historic commercial building, **Reuben J. Hameed, AIA, LEED AP BD+C**, of **HGA Architects and Engineers**, is a Woodridge resident and community advocate. After helping select the site and develop the program for the client, Hameed led a team of designers and engineers at HGA to provide "low-bono" design services at reduced rates. The firm estimates it donated $12,000 in design services and 200 hours of in-kind services.

Built in 1910, the brick-clad building, sandwiched between an ice cream shop and a convenience store, stands in the commercial heart of Woodridge. Once known as the Five Points shopping center, this row of storefronts fell into disrepair in the 1960s and beyond. In its past lives, the building housed a dry cleaner and a childcare center, but had sat vacant for the past ten years.

Comprising 2,500 square feet on three floors, the transformed 5 Points center opened last fall after nine months of construction. Its heart is the hybrid work and meeting space at street level. Folding vertical screens provide visual separation between zones, and task tables are hinge-mounted to the perimeter walls so they can be quickly folded down. The space readily transforms from an office space for ten people to a meeting space for 50. The color palette—warm gray and white with yellow and red accents—was inspired by the mid-20th-century art of the Washington Color School.

With a renovation budget of $100 per square foot, Hameed made maximum use of the building's existing architectural and structural elements. Existing screened openings on the front façade were retrofitted with clear glazing and two abandoned skylights were reopened. Exposed brick walls show traces of former partitions and paint colors. As a further cost-saving strategy, HGA negotiated nonprofit and trade discounts on building materials on behalf of the client, who then purchased the items directly.

Hameed embraced the industrial character of the basement by uncovering structural elements. An exposed steel beam, painted black, neatly divides private offices and open workspace. The wood

Basement work area.

floor structure above is painted white and the existing concrete floor slab was leveled, stained and polished. An accessible restroom and shower were added. The basement opens onto a quiet rear patio, furnished simply with picnic tables and planters.

Upstairs, a library and conference space provides a quiet retreat from the bustle of the shared workspaces below.

Service functions (kitchens, bathrooms, and storage) are efficiently clustered in the rear of the building. HVAC system improvements include an upgraded air handler and independently controlled ductless split systems on each floor.

In a neighborhood on the cusp of transformation, Mains envisions 5 Points as a bridge between longtime residents and new arrivals. So far, he's seeing signs of success. Local business owners, including the barber two blocks down, frequently swing by to say hello. ANC meetings have been held after hours in the street-level space. Freelancers and aspiring business owners are connecting with each other, building community one relationship at a time.



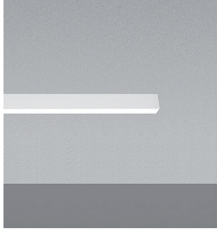
Conference room on the partial second floor at the rear of the building.

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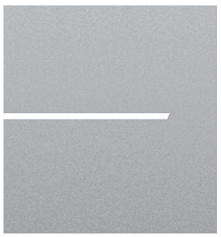
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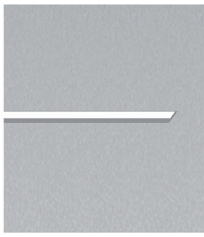
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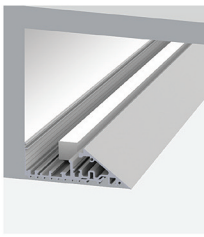
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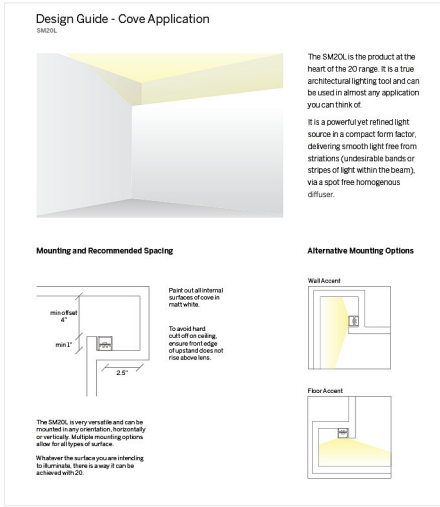


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Project: Greencourt Innovation Center,
12358 Parklawn Drive, Rockville, MD

Architects: **McInturff Architects**
Landscape Architects/Civil Engineers: **Stantec**
Structural Engineers: **1200 Architectural Engineers PLLC**
MEP Engineers: **James Posey Associates**
Acoustical Consultants: **Acoustical Design Collaborative**
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Main atrium of the Greencourt Innovation Center, with second floor conference room visible at right.

Home is Where the Innovation Is

A Residential Architect Branches into Commercial Design

by Steven K. Dickens, AIA, LEED AP

The photos are not fooling you. The Greencourt Innovation Center, by **McInturff Architects**, is one of the coolest new office buildings in the Washington area. To be sure, circumstance allowed for substantial design freedom and effort that few architects enjoy on any project, especially office buildings. This is a "boutique" building in the strictest sense of the phrase, but it lives up to the highest aspiration that that term suggests.

Mark McInturff, FAIA, is well known to *ARCHITECTUREDC* readers, primarily for his custom single-family residential projects, which perennially win *Washingtonian* and AIA|DC Chapter awards. The firm has done other project types, however. "I always say that I've done 400 houses and one of everything else," joked McInturff. Clients for his brand of inventive, individualistic, sometimes idiosyncratic design are not limited to homeowners, but the custom house remains the touchstone. "[For non-residential projects], we want clients who care about their spaces as much as they care about their homes," McInturff stated.

All photos © Julia Heine/McInturff Architects





Conference room as seen from the main staircase.

Developers Stephany Yu and Matt Chervenak had previously done business in Shanghai, China. When they looked for office space in the Washington suburbs, they sought something "exciting and interesting and inspiring," according to Yu. When no such space seemed to exist, they decided to create their own. So perhaps it is not surprising that they selected an architect in much the same way that individual homeowners often do: they looked in magazines (*ARCHITECTUREDC* most notably, we state with pride!), saw a McInturff house that spoke to them, and gave him a call. "They didn't ask if I had done much office space," McInturff noted slyly, "and I chose not to tell them."

Yu and Chervenak had purchased three adjoining 1960s warehouses in the Parklawn Drive area of Rockville. The area is chock-a-block in character, illustrative of Robert Venturi's "messy vitality" concept, with buildings of all sizes, uses, styles, ages, and levels of maintenance, amid oceans of parking lots. But the site is somewhat more pedestrian-friendly than one might assume: the area has a Walk Score of 56, which is defined as "Somewhat walkable—some errands can be accomplished on foot." It also enjoys proximity to the Twinbrook Metro Station.

McInturff immediately thought of Culver City, a post-industrial area of Los Angeles. Adventurous designs by trendy architects such as Eric Owen Moss have created a distinctive and sought-after precinct there for "creative class" companies, often by adding new floors of intense architectural elaboration atop existing boxy buildings. This needed some modification to translate to Rockville, of course—many of the Culver City buildings are downright bizarre—but it was a sound precedent.

McInturff's take on the Culver City model involved adding a glassy third floor above the existing two-story warehouses, and carving a new atrium space in the middle. Openings were cut into formerly solid masonry walls to provide windows. Structural elements, both pre-existing and new, were exposed to full effect, and the juxtaposition between the two creates immense visual interest, especially in the office areas. A layer of dark gray, highly textured brick was added to the exteriors. Bold red elements were introduced, many of them using corrugated metal siding, even on the interior. The atrium is animated by stairs, a steel bridge, the elevator tower, and windows into adjacent office areas, while the office space itself has astoundingly high ceilings and fantastic light from generous windows.

If that were the entire story, the results would still be impressive. But in architecture in general and adaptive reuse in particular, little is as it seems. McInturff architects



Peter Noonan, AIA, LEED BD+C, and **David Mogensen, AIA, LEED AP**, worked with the owners, with structural engineering company 1200 Architectural Engineers, and with general contractor Meridian Construction for three years on Greencourt, always seeking elegant solutions to the myriad of challenges.

The trusses in the atrium space, for example, are not merely cool-looking elements supporting the roof. They are also a highly-integrated solution to the structural problem of lateral bracing. The three old warehouses had little in the way of lateral support, which is necessary to resist wind loads (and in extreme circumstances, shaking from an earthquake). Adding a floor on top and cutting a lot of holes in the existing masonry walls only exacerbated the situation. The lobby's steel trusses, which connect to structural frames inserted in the northern and southern warehouses, absorb the lateral loads. But McInturff didn't leave it at that: he added two conference rooms, one literally within the truss and another hung from the truss. These floating objects within the atrium are memorable places to have a meeting.

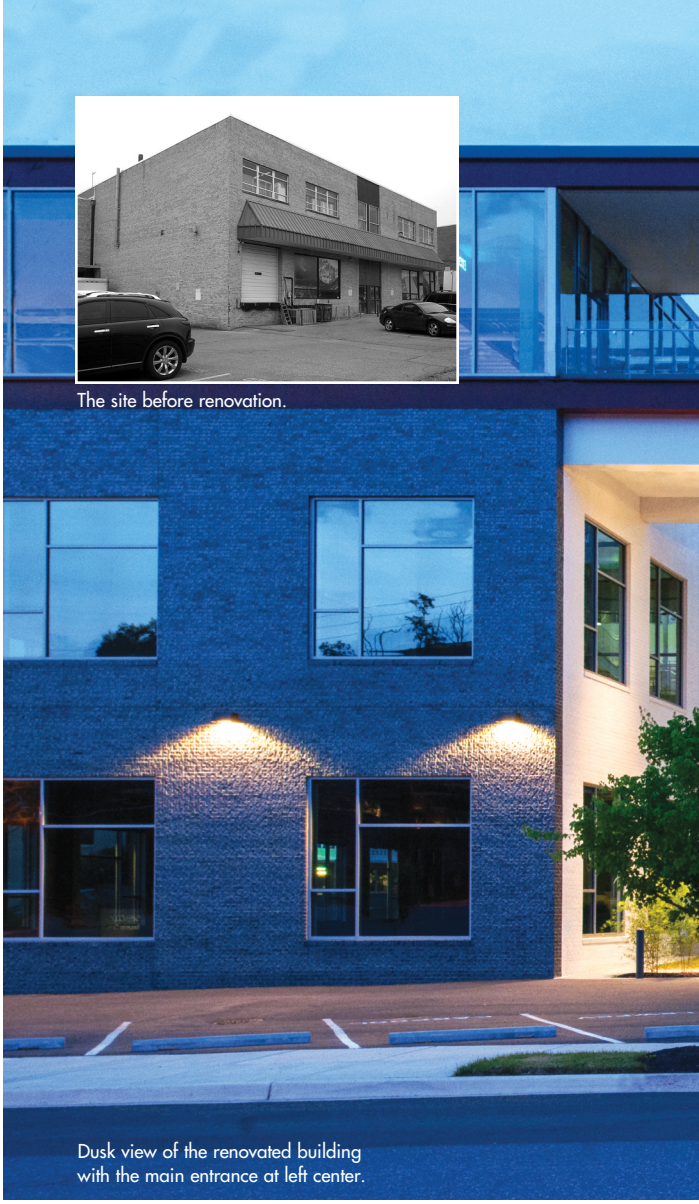
Main entrance as seen from the atrium.



Window wall of the atrium.



Corridor in the Greencourt Innovation Center.



The site before renovation.

Dusk view of the renovated building with the main entrance at left center.

Another lemonade-from-lemons effort in the atrium is evident in the stairs and elevators. The floor levels of the warehouses didn't align, but modern sensibilities (not to mention the Americans with Disabilities Act) demanded universally accessible spaces. Meanwhile, in seeking LEED Silver certification, the architects sought credit under the heading of "Design for Active Occupants," which rewards building designs that encourage physical activity (such as climbing stairs) and social interactions among the building's occupants. So it is that the stairs, elevator, and ramps that lend visual animation to the atrium also ensure accessibility and hold promise to improve the physical and social health of tenants.

"When I think of how little of the construction of a normal office building is actually visible, and virtually all of it is here, I am almost overwhelmed," wrote McInturff of Greencourt. One aspect of loft style buildings, in which structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire control systems are exposed, is that it is almost impossible to maintain compositional control over all those service elements. As a result, most loft or industrial style interiors include unplanned tangles of pipes, conduits, raceways,



and ducts, often awkwardly worked around structural elements, which themselves have clunky components and connections. Sprinkler piping and heads are often especially ruinous from an aesthetic standpoint. (As McInturff indicated, these problems also exist in more conventional buildings, of course, but are hidden above dropped ceilings or behind walls.) One approach to this problem is to accept and even celebrate the somewhat random, organic character of these overlapping systems. The other is to resist it, attempting to bring order such that all the elements contribute to a deliberate overall composition.

McInturff's team clearly fell in the second camp. The extent to which virtually all the systems and their details are organized and tamed is nothing short of amazing. Noonan and Mogenson designed the project using a BIM (Building Integration Modeling) program, which is a digital, three-dimensional version of the building. BIM models are common nowadays, but including all the structural connection details and the actual components of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems in the model is so complicated that it is rarely executed. The McInturff team not only composed everything exactingly, but had to learn (from their engineers) the code requirements of each element, and then in many cases learn (from tradesmen and subcontractors) practical requirements, which often led to redesigns. There was also an immense amount of field coordination, Noonan reports. McInturff referred to the building as "a really big Swiss watch," and noted that "[Noonan and Mogensen] both deserve enormous credit, as does Meridian Construction and their tenacious foreman."

The owners' own offices in the building are now operational, and they are vetting tenants for the rest of the space. The focus is on companies for which the word innovative makes sense: research and development, entrepreneurial start-ups, tech companies, and potentially "creative class" firms such as advertising companies. Much as shopping center owners actively seek the right retail mix, they are seeking office tenants that will make for a good fit.

The owners want, and the design of the Greencourt Innovation Center encourages, a breaking down of boundaries between tenants. "That's how innovation happens," said Chervenak, emphasizing the broader benefits. But perhaps most of all, this is Chervenak and Yu's workday *home*. That's always the main reason an architectural client, whether residential, institutional, or commercial, goes through the trouble and expense to get exceptional design. "And I *love* it," Yu emphasized repeatedly.



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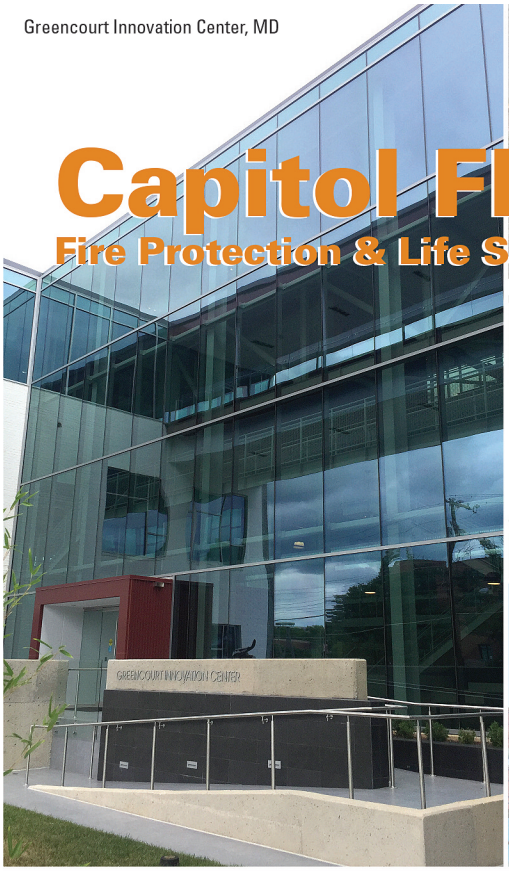

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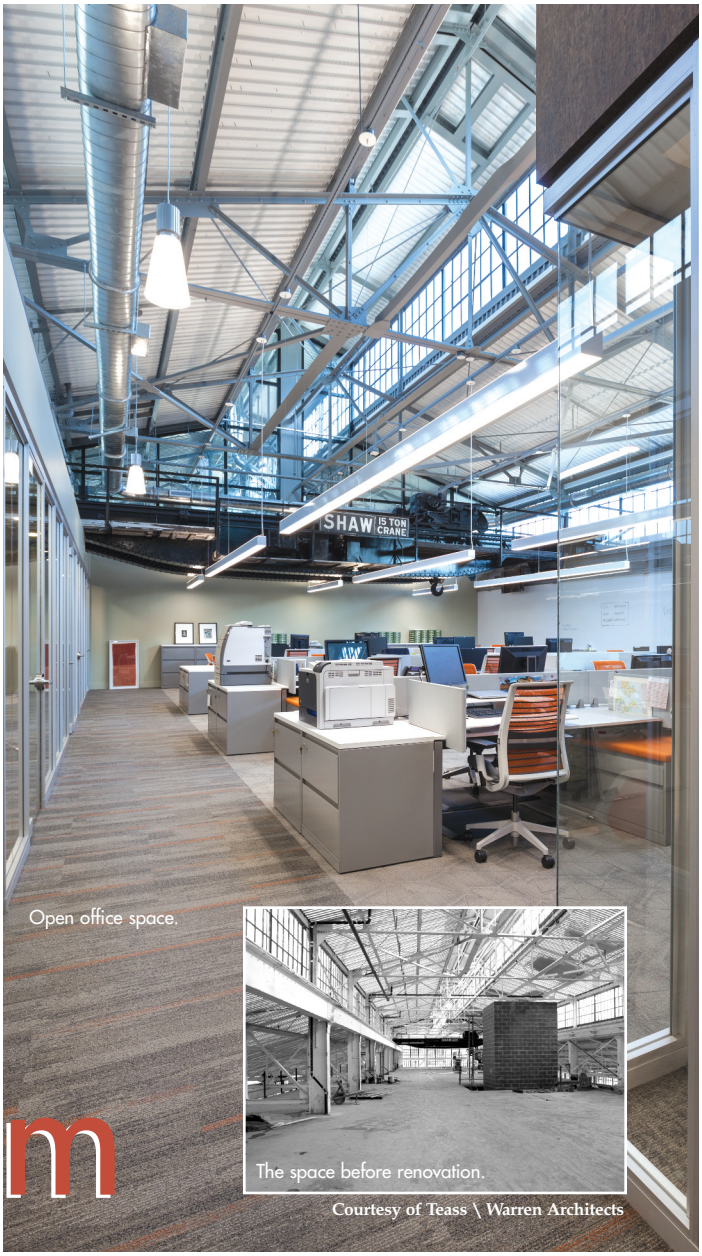
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A conference room at Mercury Public Affairs, with a linear oculus in the ceiling allowing views to the industrial clerestory windows above.



Open office space.

The space before renovation.

Courtesy of Teass \ Warren Architects

All photos © Mark Luthringer Photography, except as noted

The Medium is the Message

Industrial Interior Sets a Forward-Looking Tone for PR Firm

by Denise Liebowitz

"Our clients love this space!" said Kieran Mahoney, chief executive officer of Mercury, a high-profile, bi-partisan strategy and consulting firm with an international reach. Maybe it's the authentic industrial vibe, or the dramatic expanse of exposed structural steel, or perhaps it's the 15-ton overhead crane that evokes the enthusiasm of Mahoney and his clients. In any case, the workspace embraces its new home in the Boilermaker Building, part of the historic Navy Yard in Southeast Washington that in recent years has undergone a vast transformation as a vibrant mixed-use destination along the Anacostia River.

Constructed in 1919 for the manufacture of ship boilers, torpedo tubes, and other heavy equipment for the US Navy, the Boilermaker Building is at the hub of The Yards development. Tenants on the ground floor of the building include a brewery, restaurants, and shops. Above the retail level is 8,000 square feet of office space occupied primarily by Mercury.



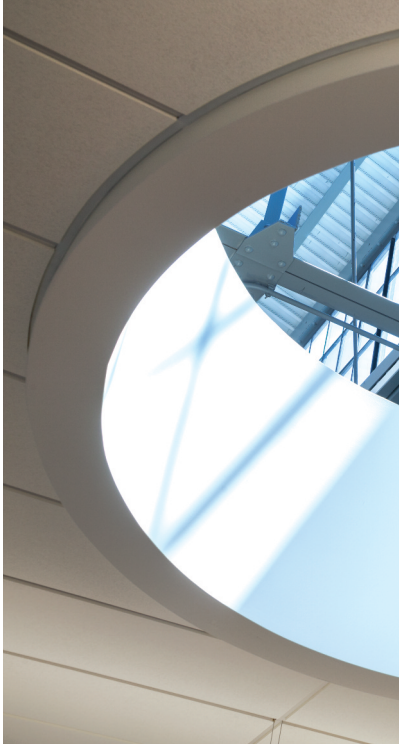
Open office area, with crane original to the building overhead.

Project: Mercury Public Affairs at Boilermaker, Washington, DC

Architects: **Teass \ Warren Architects**
MEP Engineers: **KK Engineering**
Lighting Consultants: **Coventry Lighting Design**
Contractor: **Camson Construction**



Reception area.



Round oculus in a second conference room.



Café at Mercury Public Affairs.





"The historic preservation goal here was to expose as much of the original structure as possible," explained **Will Teass, AIA, LEED AP**, founder and managing principal of **Teass\Warren Architects**. The space, with a steeply pitched roof and no windows at eye level, presented design challenges, but it benefited from two levels of clerestory windows pulling in plenty of natural light and an eye-catching industrial ceiling profile. The architects' task was to create a space for approximately 30 employees, some accommodated in an open office area and others in private offices. In addition, the program called for two conference rooms, several smaller telephone rooms, and a kitchen.

"A big challenge was the private offices that had no exterior windows," recalled Teass. "They risked being cave-like." The solution was careful interior lighting and a glass wall system that allows the private offices lining the perimeter of the floor to look out to the open work area and up into the building's impressive industrial structure. The architect tips his hat to the client, whose idea it was to expose in some of the private offices even more of the steel roof trusses than was called for in his original design.

The two conference rooms are essentially free-standing steel cubes, each with an open oculus looking up into the roof trusses, pulling in light, and adding visual interest. The massive overhead crane dominates the space leaving no doubt about the building's industrial heritage. The architect noted that several of the ground-floor tenants were offered the crane to incorporate into their spaces but declined, leaving it available to the eager Mercury client.

Teass refers to the main circulation axis that leads through the length of the office space as the "street." The floor finishes differentiate the traffic flow. The striated pattern of the "street" floor tiles breaks down the scale, and all of the floor finishes set a mechanical, industrial tone. There is no receptionist function or space; visitors are simply buzzed up from the street entrance of the building. The open work area has the feel of a newsroom and is finished in a neutral palette of colors and materials with jolts of vibrant orange.

"We were in Class A office space in Penn Quarter where the vibe was high-end law firm," explained CEO Mahoney, describing the firm's previous Washington office. It was a traditional, generic design of private offices without open work areas. Mahoney and his team knew that proximity to the US Capitol was essential to their business, and looked for space in both Penn Quarter and The Yards. "We felt The Yards had a fresher vibe and we liked the ability to fashion a non-traditional space. The Boilermaker offered visual pizzazz."

According to Mahoney, the Mercury headquarters office in New York City made the switch to open office design years ago, when then-mayor Michael Bloomberg famously introduced an open "Bullpen" for his City Hall staff that mimicked the Wall Street trading floors he was familiar with. "We loved it in New York and we wanted it for our space in Washington."

Mahoney reports that in addition to the crane and all the steel, visiting clients are drawn to a piece of Mercury corporate history hanging in the kitchen. There, the mangled hood of a Porsche GT3 Formula One racecar, sponsored by Mercury and bearing its logo, commemorates a spectacular racetrack crash.

"And never undersell the value of 81 home games," Mahoney said referring to the nearby Nationals Ballpark. Our staff and clients enjoy going there and we love the urban density and what the Yards is becoming."





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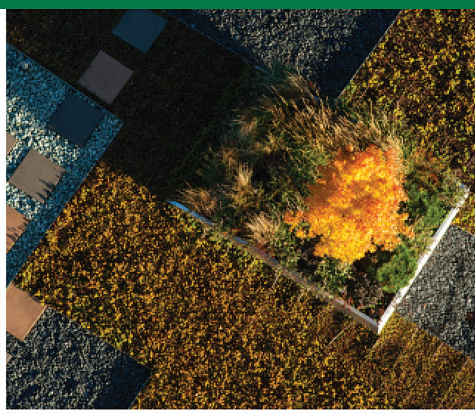


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Democracy Lives In Light

Washington Post Occupies State-of-the-Art New Facility

by Denise Liebowitz

Open staircase connecting the two newsroom levels of the *Washington Post* offices, with the Bradlee Story Conference Room at lower left.

All photos © Garrett Rowland



Main reception area of the fourth floor events space.

The slogan of the Washington *Post*, "Democracy Dies in Darkness," was adopted in March of this year, some time after the *Post* moved into six floors of One Franklin Square, at 1301 K Street, NW. It is generally assumed that the slogan is a response to political conditions in Washington and elsewhere. But one wonders if the new offices might have influenced—perhaps subliminally—the choice of the slogan, because their wonderful brightness is such a contrast to the dingy spaces the *Post* had occupied for so long on 15th Street, NW.

Most prosaically, the light comes from fluorescent and LED strips, employed in crisp corporate fashion. More light (this time with a bluish tinge) comes from hundreds of television screens, distributed throughout the facility, showing a mix of current *Post* online stories, print edition pages, and outside media sources. Sunlight comes from windows that ring the spaces. Moreover, the *Post* being a 24/7 operation, the light goes outward, most noticeably at night in the winter, when the *Post*'s bright windows, viewed from Franklin Square, advertise a hive of activity when most K Street offices are dark.

This sense of light, however, is not merely measured in lumens. "[*Post* CEO] Fred Ryan said one hundred times, 'We want an *energized* newsroom, and we want it to feel like the largest newsroom *in the world*,'" said **John McKinnon, IIDA, LEED AP**, a senior associate at **Gensler** and the design director for the three-year project. The very size and energetic busy-ness of the *Post* seem to create their own light.

Project: Washington Post,
Washington, DC

Architects: **Gensler**
Structural Engineers: **SK&A Associates**
MEP Engineers: **WSP USA**
Audiovisual/IT Consultants: **CMS Innovative Consultants**
Fire/Life Safety Consultants: **Aon Fire Protection Engineering Corporation**
Food Service Consultants: **Woodburn & Associates, Inc.**
Broadcast Consultants: **Severn**
Contractor: **rand* construction corporation**

One direct application of Ryan's goals is the location of three "open set positions." These spaces are essentially just open areas, with a little extra lighting, sited within the expanse of open-office workstations on the two newsroom floors. They serve as unenclosed, short-notice television recording studios for *Post* reporters to videotape breaking news reports for the website or to participate remotely in television talk shows. The locations of the "open set positions" were carefully chosen, and the camera views designed, to show an apparently endless newsroom, with scores of reporters at work, a dozen TV screens flickering the latest news, and of course the *Post*'s logotype discreetly (but unmistakably) looming in the background. It's all carefully composed, to be sure, but in no way artificial: it really is the newsroom, and those really are *Post* employees scurrying around. The energy flows both ways: viewers see an



The News Hub, with the Bradlee Story Conference Room in the background.

active, impressively large newsroom, and the employees see their work being broadcast to the world.

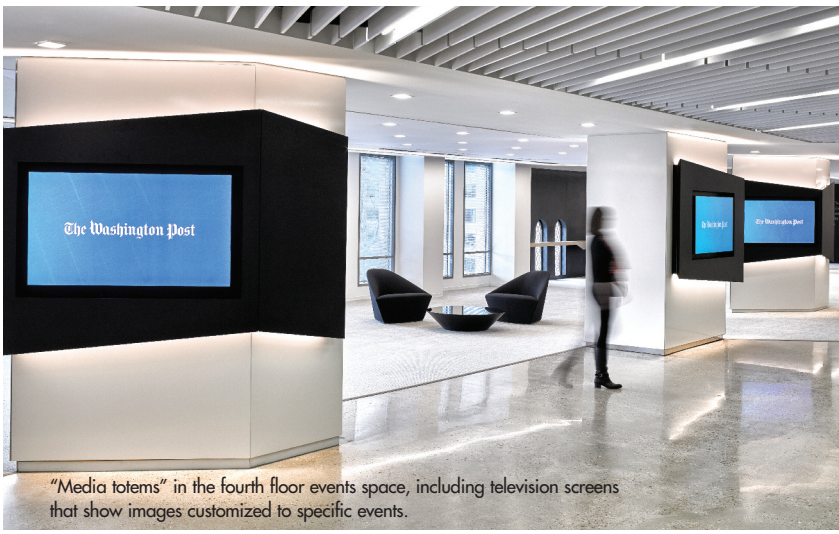
The two floors that constitute the newsroom, housing some 950 *Post* reporters, editors, and (equally crucially) IT support, have a core of spaces, some double-height, which literally and figuratively connect the floors. Occupying the geometric center of the building is the glass-enclosed Bradlee Story Conference Room, named for longtime editor Ben Bradlee. It is flanked by three double-height spaces. One is a pre- and post-meeting informal social area that also serves as a waiting room for special guests; another contains a broad open stair connecting the two levels. The third, called the News Hub, is the nerve center of the news operation, where a specialized group of editors, digital team leaders, and other key players constantly monitors two dozen screens and several crawls, keeping tabs on both news from around the world and digital analytics of *Post* stories.

The wall beside the stairway has graphics of famous *Post* front pages from the past, including the one bearing the dramatic headline "NIXON RESIGNS." The wall behind the lounge area has, in similar format, a permanent display of the names of *Post* employees who have won Pulitzer prizes (with plenty of room to expand—the *Post* is not resting on its laurels!). Above this Wall of Fame is a Ben Bradlee quotation: "The truth, no matter how bad, is never as dangerous as a lie in the long run." The other sides of the





Seating area of the fourth floor events space. Visible at left are arched windows in the restored façade of the historic Almas Temple, which was moved and incorporated into the base building that houses *The Washington Post*.



"Media totems" in the fourth floor events space, including television screens that show images customized to specific events.

Hub and Story Conference Room directly abut newsroom workstation areas, conveying the message that these core functions may be special and vital, but they are integrally connected, both physically in the suite layout and functionally to the rest of the newsroom.

The Hub's configuration allows the editors to access, efficiently and ergonomically, a vast array of information needed to sustain a constant flow of editorial decisions, and to confer easily with one another. Adjacent to the Hub is the glassed-in Story Conference Room, where a leadership team, including top editors and others, meets twice a day to review finalized drafts of stories assigned from the Hub. This group determines placement of the top stories in the various media platforms of the *Post*. It is here that stories of central importance are also edited in the traditional sense of the word: fact-checked, reviewed for stylistic cohesion and completeness, and so forth.

That this is a glass-enclosed room is not merely a stylistic gesture or even a literal indication of the "transparency" that is so central to the *Post*'s corporate values. Direct line of sight to the Hub is functionally vital, as crucial metrics are constantly shifting. Other sides of the room look to the newsroom operations—its desks, screens, meeting rooms, and so forth—and to the walls with the historic front pages and the inspirational Bradlee quotation. Another well-known Bradlee quote holds that the "News is the first draft of history," and it is not an exaggeration to say that this



Informal conference space overlooking the News Hub one floor below.



A staff collaboration space with notable *Post* headlines on the glass partition at right.

"first draft" is quite literally created in the Hub and Story Conference Room. The design of these core spaces not only supports the organization's functions, but also imbues them with a sense of energy, excitement, and gravity.

Specialized though they are, these core newsroom spaces have a secondary function: hosting celebrations. For example, when a *Post* employee wins a Pulitzer, an announcement ceremony takes place here. The monitors are switched to party-decorations mode, and employees ring the balcony railings above to watch the event. A new name is added to the Wall of Fame, and then, of course, everyone—including the winner—gets back to work, which, given that the Hub is the physical center of the newsroom, never involves more than a short walk.

So much energy comes from the basic functioning of the place that part of Gensler's task was to provide a countervailing *calm*. "There's a sense of buzz, even when there's not a big breaking story. You see people running around, literally," said Gensler associate **Carol Schneider, IIDA, LEED AP**, a lead interior designer on the project. This fulfills CEO Ryan's desire for a high-energy space, she allowed, "But you still need to be able to get work done." Physical sound control is provided by carpet in workstation areas and some meeting rooms, acoustic tile ceilings, and sound-absorbing black foam installed above the diagonal ceiling slats. Aesthetic calm comes from a neutral palette of black, white, grey, and light-toned wood. The main accent is the blue—the particular shade of a video screen background—which appears not only on so many of the screens, but also in upholstery of casual seating in breakout areas.

The intention was to give emphasis to the *Post*'s greatest assets: its employees and content. Part of the architects' achievement is that the visual focus is provided, but the setting is neither boring nor background. Floor materials are constantly shifting, from sealed concrete to wood to carpet. In common-use spaces the carpets are mostly bound area rugs, but in all areas carpets have linear patterns that have constant subtle shifts. Ceiling designs are also constantly modulating in modest ways—not enough to be distracting, but sufficient to maintain interest.

Gensler's design strikes a balance between the storied history of the *Post*—a source of inspiration and pride—and the reality of the fast-moving world of the modern mass media. At 242,000 square feet of office space and some 1,575 employees in a dozen divisions over six floors, "This isn't a start-up company," emphasized designer McKinnon. "But in many ways they must act as if they are."

References to the *Post*'s past are almost as ubiquitous as the television monitors that broadcast present-day affairs. The Ben Bradlee quotation adjacent to the Story Conference Room is only the most prominent of dozens of quotations by *Post* luminaries. In addition to the wall of front pages, some glass walls are decorated with word clouds of headlines. The larger conference rooms are named for various publishers and top brass from the pre-Bezos era of the *Post*. The entrance from the elevator lobby to the most public portion of the offices, the 4th floor special events space, features the *Washington Post* logotype sign salvaged from the former headquarters building. This is counterbalanced by what Gensler calls "media totems," which are columns wrapped in monitors showing imagery customized to each event.

The mostly black-and-white palette speaks to the physical character of a printed newspaper. Architecturally, the general feeling of the office space is clean and polished, as one would expect for an established corporation, but there are offsetting touches—exposed areas of ceiling with ducts and conduit visible, exposed concrete columns—that speak to the industrial loft style associated with start-ups in general and technology companies in specific.

The company's new office search started in 2013, with Gensler test-fitting some 35 buildings. The *Post* had settled upon One Franklin Square, and schematic design was well underway, prior to Amazon founder Jeffrey Bezos's purchase of the company in mid-2014. Bezos' team shifted the direction toward new media, and cut the amount of leased space considerably without cutting staff size. That meant the adoption of what Gensler refers to as "universal planning," in which more than 90% of the staff gets a uniform bench-style workstation, six feet long with an L-shaped return. Only 7% of the staff has private offices. There are, however, copious collaboration spaces, as well as small enclosed spaces, sometimes called phone rooms, where one can have a private phone conversation or work in silence and solitude.

"It had to work for 40-year print veterans, the *Post*'s in-house SnapChat staff, and everyone in between," commented McKinnon. Doubtless there are employees who miss their private offices, but the *Post* overall is thriving, and the energized atmosphere sought by CEO Ryan is unmistakable. With assistance from Gensler and Jeffrey Bezos, the *Washington Post* has come out of the darkness.

An "open set position" amidst the newsroom.

A series of informal collaboration spaces of varying sizes and degrees of enclosure.



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Taking the Office for a Spin

Toyota's Government Affairs Division Exudes a Meticulous Elegance

by G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA

Main reception area of the Toyota Government Affairs offices.

The earliest automobiles tended to be haphazard-looking things—ungainly assemblages of overstuffed seats, flimsy fenders, rickety wheels, and clumsy protuberances housing crude headlights. By the mid-20th century, most car manufacturers had adopted a more holistic design approach, albeit one that often favored memorable form over mundane function. Today, even the most average cars are marvels of integrated design and engineering, with advanced materials and electronics incorporated into digitally sculpted bodies assembled with precision.

The new Toyota Government Affairs Office, by **Gensler**, evokes the elegance, technological sophistication, and meticulous craftsmanship associated with some of the finest modern-day cars. The finish materials are sleek yet sturdy, seating is firm yet comfortable, and aesthetic accents are employed judiciously. The details of the interior partitions, built-in furnishings, lighting, and other permanent elements are carefully designed and precisely executed. The space feels contemporary in the truest sense of the word—it is absolutely of-the-moment, but free of trendy motifs that might make it feel dated after a short time.

Gensler's team, led by **Jill Goebel, IIDA, LEED AP**, design director and principal, drew inspiration from the concept of craft, which they saw as a link between traditional Japanese culture—think of exquisitely made boxes and delicate origami—and modern car-making. That link seemed to mirror Toyota's evolving corporate identity. "It's based in Japan, obviously, but it's transitioning to becoming a US corporation, too," said Goebel. "There was a new person leading this office, and he wanted the space to project an image of bold leadership."

The office occupies two levels of a building in the Penn Quarter neighborhood. The lower level includes a generous reception and conference area, the site of frequent events for political and business leaders, along with offices for personnel working on regulatory issues. The upper level consists mostly of offices for policy-oriented staffers along with employee amenity spaces. Connecting the two levels is a swirling staircase with cast terrazzo treads and curved glass railings supported by a pair of twisting steel beams finished in lustrous but environment-friendly low-VOC (volatile organic compound) paint.

"[Toyota] had already chosen this space when we were hired, [and] there was already a hole in the floor for stairs between the two levels," Goebel noted, "but it was in the wrong place. We explained to them why it was important to move, and fortunately, they agreed. So we cut a new hole and built the stair." That decision was obviously an expensive one, but its wisdom is evident: the staircase now serves as the monumental centerpiece of the office's most public area. Much like a grand hearth in a classic open-plan, mid-20th-century house, it simultaneously unites the space while defining subspaces where small groups may gather for conversation.



Project: Toyota Government Affairs Offices, Washington, DC

Architects: **Gensler**
Structural Engineers: **Thornton Tomasetti**
Mechanical/Civil Engineers: **Girard Engineering**
Lighting Consultants: **SBLD Studio**
Acoustical Consultants: **Miller, Beam & Paganelli, Inc.**
Commissioning Agents: **Sustainable Building Partners**
Contractor: **HITT Contracting, Inc.**

All photos © Garrett Rowland



Spiral staircase. A "rock garden" of porcelain stones was installed at the base after this photo was taken.



Conference room with video screens.

Beyond the main reception and conference area, private offices line the perimeter of both levels. Glass partitions admit natural light to internal spaces, including meeting rooms and a small cafeteria with a single communal table to encourage staff interaction. "There are lots of conference calls with people in Japan—both after hours and before hours," said Goebel, "so we created some living-room-like spaces where they could feel comfortable while on long calls."

As Goebel pointed out, a government affairs office, even if its ultimate purpose is selling ideas, is utterly unlike a retail sales facility. While car dealerships are notorious for their brash, even outlandish efforts to attract the attention of buyers, the hallmark of this space is subtlety. Visual references to cars, automotive design, and Toyota's corporate identity abound in the space, but many of them are understated. A visitor emerging from the elevator could easily overlook, for instance, the floorplate at the threshold bearing the Toyota logotype—an allusion to the metal plate at the bottom of the opening for a car door. Even when actual corporate symbols appear, they are often unassuming, as in the Toyota logotype behind the main reception desk, in which only the edges of the recessed letters are painted red, lending the faintest pink cast to the otherwise white-on-white lettering.

Bolder decorative elements are carefully distributed throughout the space so as to give them some breathing room. Lining one wall of the elevator lobby is a series of aluminum panels with custom-cut perforations suggesting both tire treads and the characteristic grills of recent models by Lexus, Toyota's high-end brand. Custom artworks, curated by j fine art, LLC, include acrylic murals by



Small conference room with mural by Aniekan Udofia.





Corridor with custom artwork incorporating a Toyota Tundra fender.

Aniekan Udofia depicting vibrant street scenes, a Japanese tea service table fashioned from the engine of a Toyota Celica, and a porcelain "rock" garden at the base of the spiral staircase (added after the pictures reproduced in this article were taken). Especially engaging is a wall sculpture along one of the office corridors incorporating the fender from a Toyota Tundra pick-up truck.

Complementing the mostly white-and-gray color palette are swaths of vivid red, Toyota's signature corporate color. This accent color seems to have been treated almost with reverence. It appears only on glass or fabric, rather than paint, "so that it always has life to it," according to Goebel.

Asked about the client's satisfaction with the results, Goebel reported that, for the official opening of the office, the head of the division personally prepared a flyer touting Gensler's work. "He basically made an ad for us," she said, "because he was so proud of the space."



Conference room and informal seating area, separated by glass partition.



Elevator lobby, with aluminum wall panels inspired by the front grill of a Lexus.



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Coffee bar in the Kettler office. Note the horizontal slot in the far corner, a recurring motif in the space.

Design at Work

Breaking Down Barriers in a Developer's Office

by Denise Liebowitz

All photos © Ron Blunt Architectural Photography



Reception area and adjacent conference room.

Project: Kettler,
McLean, VA

Architects: **FOX Architects**
MEP Engineers: **DDG Virginia Engineering, PC**
Glass Consultants: **Design Glazing Concepts**
Furniture Consultants: **Washington Workplace**
Project Managers: **The Magellan Group**
Contractor: **Lansdowne Construction**

Contemporary office design is as much about community as it is about the work. Increasingly, architects are recognizing—in ways both subtle and striking—that space determines human behavior, and perhaps nowhere more so than in the workplace. Command-and-control, top-down management styles have given way to collaborative decision making; closed-in, private offices are being scrapped to make room for teamwork and technology; and the demand for flexible spaces has given rise to huddle rooms, collision areas, phone booths, homey lounges, and quiet corners.

In addition to its flexible and collaborative benefits, an open office layout is frequently the most space-efficient and cost-effective approach to workplace design. Certainly that is the experience of Kettler, a leading real estate development and property management company headquartered in Tysons, Virginia. In recently merging its previously distinct property management activities and development business into one cohesive enterprise, Kettler decided to use the opportunity to relocate its employees into redesigned office space in a nearby Tysons building.

In the previous location, the two Kettler companies had a total of 150 employees occupying 43,000 square feet spread across five floors. In the new building, there are still 150 employees, but now they occupy only 35,000 square feet on one and a half floors. "The reduction of square footage was quite intentional," said Cindy Fisher, Kettler's chief administrative officer. "We wanted to use our square footage more efficiently and we wanted more open space and collaborative environment for all our employees."

The move from the previous building not only resulted in a reduction of square footage, but the budget for high-end luxury finishes was smaller, too. "Kettler's former space was heavy, like an old-school law firm," recalled **Michelle Reyman, AIA, LEEP AP**, technical director at **FOX Architects** and project manager on the Kettler job. "The space didn't reflect the Kettler brand and management really wanted something more progressive that encouraged cross-collaboration."

Reyman described an iterative process as the architects worked with Kettler managers and employees, helping them find their comfort level with a design that features far fewer private offices and much more communal space. "We did it department by department," recalled Reyman. "Some like Marketing and IT embraced the open office concept quickly; others—the more 'heads-down' offices like Legal—really felt they needed to retain some private workspaces."



Coffee bar and lounge area.



Employee café.

A sense of the Kettler style gradually emerged from these design consultations. The clear consensus was for professional and sophisticated rather than trendy or techie. "The word 'tailored' kept coming up," recalled Reyman. "Like a man's suit; classic and business-like but something that can be kept current with careful accessories."

Reyman and her team focused on this desire for a modern, professional look as they honed to clean lines, minimal furnishings, and a calm palette with well-placed snaps of bright color. They also sought ways to recapture the sense of luxury that had defined the previous office space, but here the challenge was to achieve it on a much-reduced budget. High design for lower cost is found throughout the Kettler suite. The architects themselves designed the dramatic lighting fixture in the reception area to keep the large installation affordable. Similarly, the black metal framing around windows and interior glass doors and panels was custom fabricated and far less costly than off-the-shelf framing systems.

While most of the office suite is carpeted, the porcelain tile that demarcates the reception area mimics stone for a more high-end look. The pattern of the vinyl tiles in the kitchen, an abstracted image of residential floor plans, is both visually distinctive and a subtle reference to

Kettler's real estate business. Another inexpensive but high-impact focal point is a stylized rendering of the greater Washington region above the banquette seating in the employees lounge. The FOX team produced the image in Photoshop for little cost.

"We were surprised at how our employees for the most part accepted the transition to the more open plan," said Kettler's Fisher. "As possible floor plans were being considered, we shared them with the staff, and they were able to walk the new space as it was under construction." What she mostly hears these days from employees is how functional they are finding the new office to be. Staff members, who in the past rarely ascended to the upper floor occupied by senior management, now report feeling far more integrated into the organization. Fisher says they appreciate that natural light, no longer reserved for private offices that lined the perimeter of the old office, now floods the communal areas in the new one.

"Actually, it seemed more difficult for employees to give up their paper than their private offices," said Fisher. As part of the move, Kettler embraced the electronic, greatly reduced file space, and encouraged managers and employees to ditch paper. "We wanted this space to feel fresh and contemporary for our employees and it does. When visitors enter the office, they notice. As property managers and developers this is the look we want to project."



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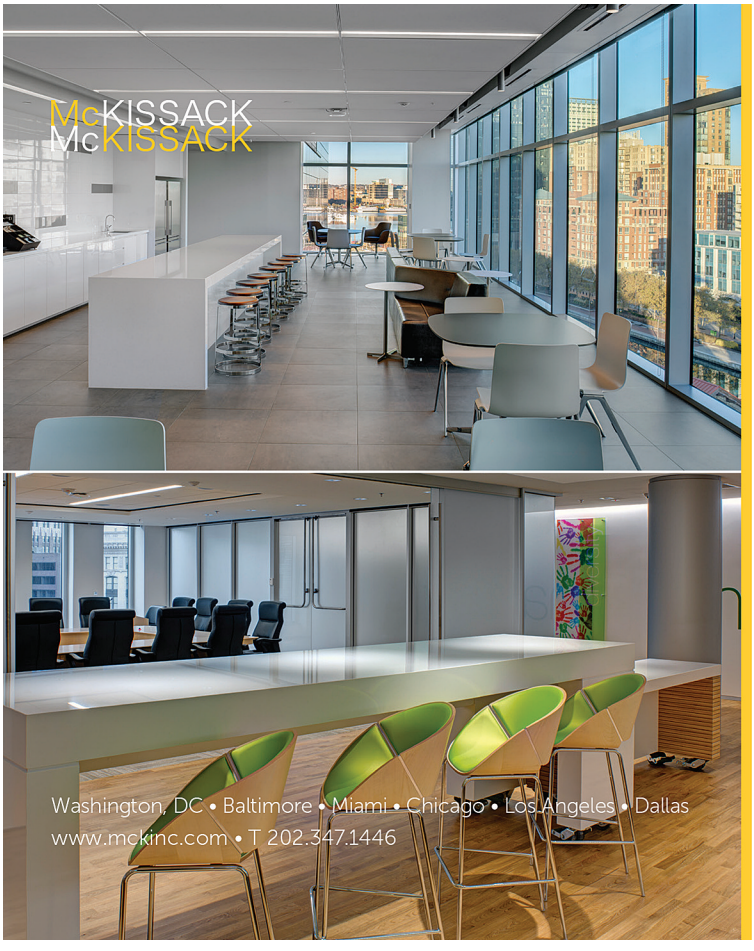
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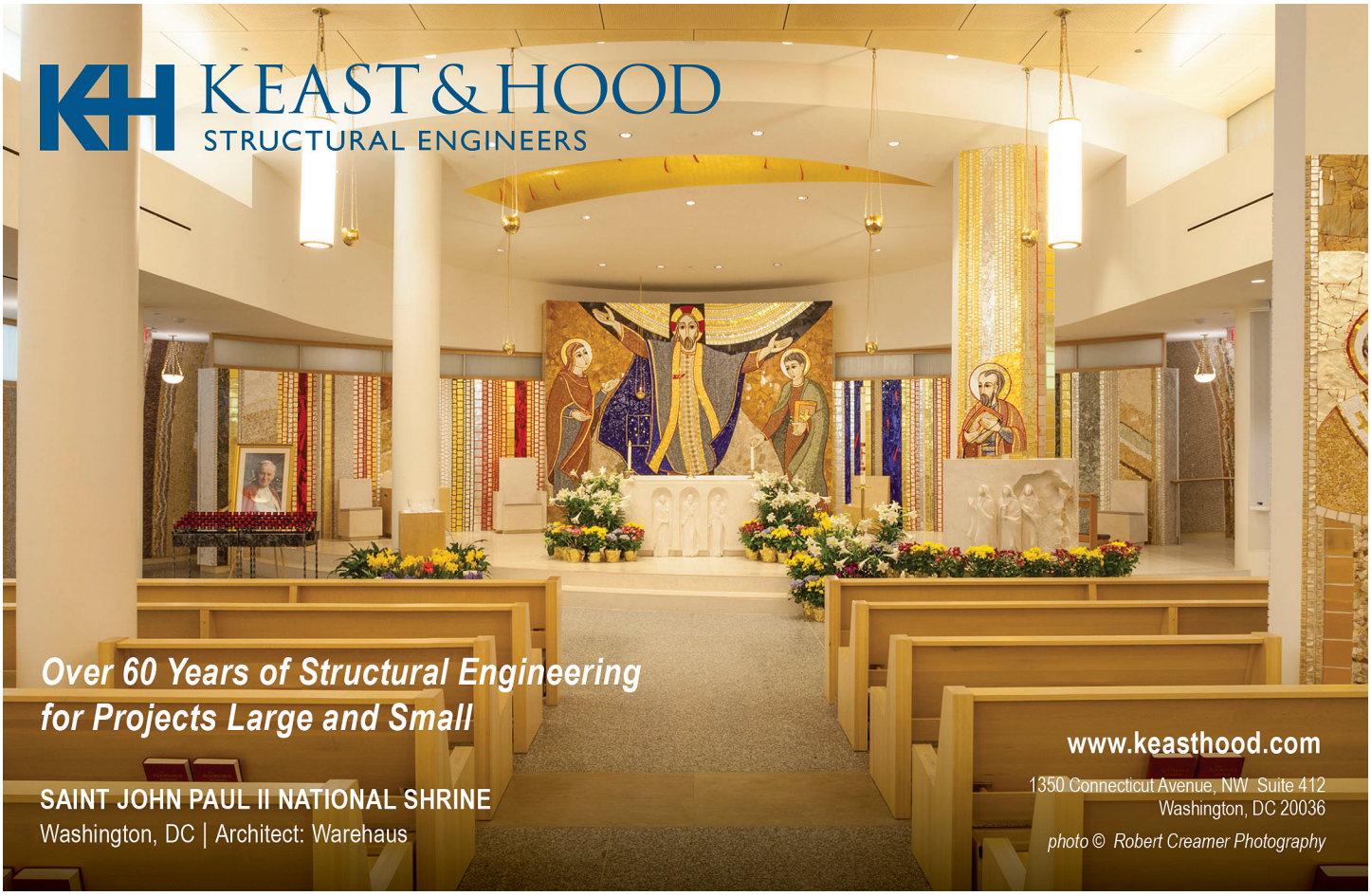
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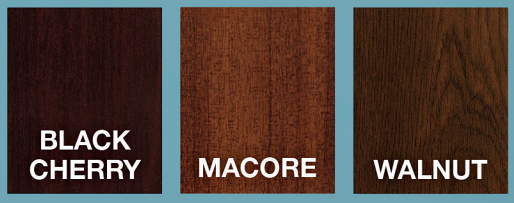
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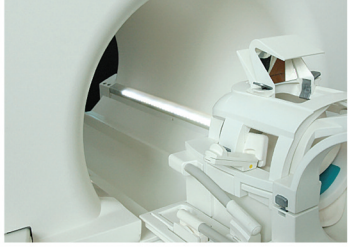




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